

Pecha Kucha or Creatively Crafting Chit Chat Presentations with Concision and Precision

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When the call for papers came out for the 2012 SHIFT conference, I was drawn to a presentation format that I had not come across before. The call told me that a 'Pecha Kucha', is a format that:

Originated in Tokyo in 2003. Drawing its name from the Japanese term for the sound of "chit chat", it follows a presentation format that is based on a simple idea: each presenter has 20 slides, each shown for 20 seconds on a timer. Thus, each presenter has just 6 minutes and 40 seconds to explain their ideas before the next takes the stage (SHIFT, 2012).

It turns out that the Pecha Kucha is everywhere; it is trade-marked, there are Pecha Kucha nights, Pecha Kucha training, and almost 19,000 Pecha Kucha videos on YouTube. I wanted to join this global phenomenon and submitted my abstract.

I structured my Pecha Kucha around a piece of research that I had carried out into the experiences of higher education academics teaching overseas on transnational programmes. I divided my material into 20 slides, sought out relevant images and scripted my presentation so that each slide did not go over the 20 seconds. In contrast to my preparation for more traditional presentations, the Pecha Kucha forced me to explain key points with more precision. With only 20 seconds per slide, every word mattered and I chose my words with care and practised the presentation more times than I ordinarily would. The delivery of the Pecha Kucha was exhilarating: I was conscious of the ticking clock and the advancing slides. The resulting presentation was polished and pacy. The presentation received great reviews: 'excellent, succinct, informative'; 'excellent'; 'great format, really well done'. In the ensuing discussion, we talked about the value of this form of presentation to teaching and learning. The presenters and the audience alike felt this would be a good format to use with students because of its strict timings, emphasis on key points, and, frankly, its novelty.

There is a burgeoning research literature suggesting that Pecha Kuchas are both beneficial to and well-rated by students. Klentzin et al (2010) studied the Pecha Kucha compared to a PowerPoint in a lecture context and found it to be an effective instruction method. Miller Beyer (2011) compared student Pecha Kuchas presentations with those using PowerPoint. She found that the quality of Pecha Kuchas was the same or better than PowerPoints, and that Pecha Kuchas received higher student ratings.

I began to think about the applicability to my own teaching on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. One of our sessions focuses on Learning Theories. This can be rather dry and I wanted to liven up the session. I felt student-produced Pecha Kuchas, overviewing learning theories and theorists, would do this and result in a useful resource base. The cohort was split into eight groups of four (four online groups and four face-to-face). While the

online group posted their Pecha Kuchas to Moodle (either as YouTube videos or narrated PowerPoints), the face-to-face group presented live and their presentations were recorded. There was a buzz in the room as they prepared to present, last minute discussions about timing and content, and anticipation about the approach their peers would adopt. The presentations went well – the groups kept to time and gave structured overviews of their allocated theory. One group used an interesting discussion format, while others used well-chosen images to complement their words. In the post-presentation evaluation, the participants admitted that the presentations had been time-consuming to prepare, some felt restrained by the structure and the discipline, and others challenged by the delivery. Overall, however, the feedback was positive. They described Pecha Kuchas as an ‘interesting approach to gain an overview of complex topics’ and a ‘good way of identifying the essentials’. Pecha Kuchas were also seen as a welcome alternative to PowerPoint, which can: ‘no doubt be a little dull and this gives a bit of fizz to it’. They could also see the benefit for their own teaching, particularly to draw out the key points at the end of a lecture. Are Pecha Kuchas the way forward? I think they make a useful addition to the suite of learning and teaching approaches. They are a powerful means of developing students’ synthesis skills and time-keeping, and for us to summarise, overview or simply spice up our presentations. But like chit chat, they have their time and place.

References

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Author Biography

Karen Smith is a senior lecturer in educational development. She teaches on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and is critical friend to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. She is an active higher education research and has published in the areas of transnational higher education, higher education policy and practice, and innovation in learning and teaching. She is also *Compass*’s managing editor.